



# News Release

---

**For immediate release:** June 3, 2009

(09-096)

Contacts: Tim Church, Communications Office  
Donn Moyer, Communications Office

360-236-4077  
360-236-4076

**West Nile virus detected in Yakima County mosquitoes — first of the season**  
*Avoiding mosquito bites is key to preventing West Nile infection*

**OLYMPIA** — Mosquito samples collected in Yakima County that tested positive for West Nile virus are the first signal of the presence of the disease in Washington in 2009. It's one of the earliest detections of West Nile virus since state health monitoring began in 2001.

Mosquito season is in full swing throughout the state, leading health officials to advise taking steps to prevent insect bites.

"We've seen West Nile virus in our state over the last several years," said Gregg Grunenfelder, environmental health division assistant secretary for the state Department of Health. "And this year, it's making an early appearance. West Nile virus can be very serious. Taking a few precautions to avoid mosquito bites can prevent infection."

Three people infected with West Nile virus were reported as Washington cases last year. Personal protection is a key prevention tool. "The best strategy against diseases transmitted by mosquitoes is to use bug repellant and wear long pants and sleeves outdoors when mosquitoes are active," Grunenfelder said. "If you can, stay indoors when mosquitoes are out. But if you're going to be outside when mosquitoes are buzzing, do what you can to protect yourself."

Simple steps to discourage mosquito breeding can also help. Reduce mosquito larvae habitat around the home by dumping water that collects in cans, old tires, wading pools, or pet dishes. And it helps to keep water fresh in birdbaths, fountains, animal troughs, and other places by changing it once or twice a week. Window and door screens should be in good working order to limit the number of mosquitoes that get inside the home.

West Nile virus season arrives

June 3, 2009

Page 2

For some people, West Nile infection can be very serious, and even fatal. Most people bitten by a mosquito carrying West Nile virus don't become ill, yet some may have mild to severe flu-like symptoms. A small number of people may develop a serious neurological disease. People over 50 and those with compromised immune systems are at higher risk for serious illness.

In addition to the three human cases in Washington last year, 41 horses, 24 birds, and 57 mosquito samples tested positive for West Nile virus in 2008. Most were in Yakima and Benton Counties; detections were also made elsewhere in central Washington as well as west of the Cascade Mountains.

The Benton County Mosquito Control District collected the positive mosquito samples in Yakima County near the Benton-Yakima County line. The mosquito control district plans to spray for mosquitoes this week. For information on the spraying schedule, contact the mosquito control district office, 509-967-2414.

###

Visit the Washington Department of Health Web site at <a href="http://www.doh.wa.gov">http://www.doh.wa.gov</a> for <i>a healthy dose of information</i> .
--